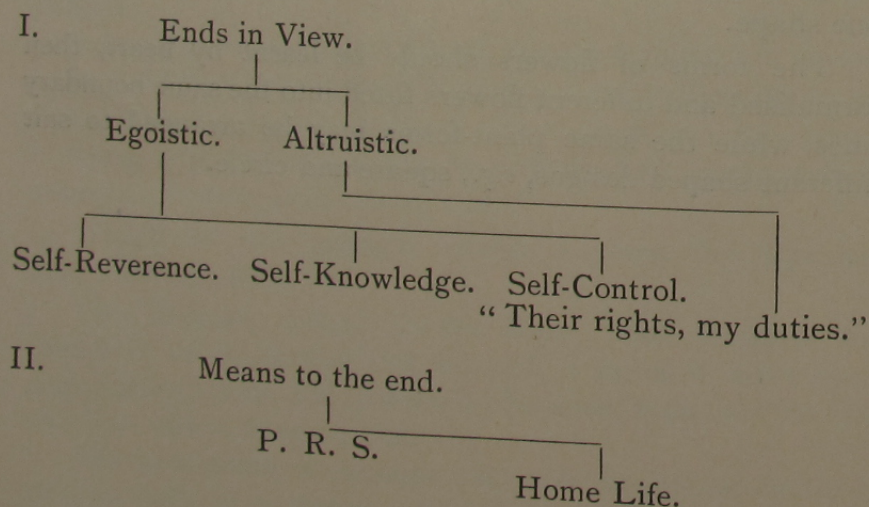


## CHARACTER TRAINING.

E. C. ALLEN.

### INTRODUCTION.

It is very unwillingly that I have consented to read a paper on this subject. I asked for it, and was to have said something akin to it at the last Conference, but the paper got crowded out with the stress we then had. I felt humble then. Now, with two years more effort behind me, I feel more than ever that somehow I miss the crux, the essential, the spring that goes to ensure some measure of success in Character Training. Therefore, I stand here to ask for help. I thought there might be others among us who can sympathise with me, who have found similar difficulties, and I think if I try to put plainly before you what I have done, and where I have failed, you will perhaps afterwards, in discussion and in the other papers, be able to show me *why* I have done so.



### STATEMENT.

I have divided my ideas into two parts. First: On what lines we wish to train the children; second, what means we

## CHARACTER TRAINING.

27

may employ to attain our ends. And here I shall limit myself almost entirely to what happens in school hours, because it is there, perhaps, that our greatest efforts are expended, and where our influence can be most easily felt.

### I.—OBJECTS DESIRED.

To take the first part. Our desires for the children are twofold. We want to give them a right aspect of themselves, and a loving attitude towards their fellows. We want to teach them "self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control."

### EGOTISTIC SELF-REVERENCE.

We wish to teach the children self-reverence by giving them a high standard for themselves, by teaching them self-respect—what a school boy calls "good form." Such a standard for their own thoughts and actions as shall forbid meanness and deceit, and shirking; that will condemn careless work as well as selfish play. A wholesome and hearty desire to live a sunny life, that shall include business and pleasure, and keep the balance between both.

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

Such a standard cannot be raised without knowledge. True self-knowledge that shall humbly know its own weakness; the knowledge that makes a careless child do its sums over twice, or read his exercise over again because he knows mistakes are the most likely things to find.

Self-knowledge of things they can do well is in its way quite a spur to children. The little girl who *knows* she can pour out tea nicely, or tie up a parcel neatly, has that knowledge to help her to do so always well, as well as the great desire to add more to her list of accomplishments. It is a great thing for a child to have something in his life he can be proud of—if it is only a cricket average—which is a very different thing from idle boasting.

### SELF-CONTROL.

To make such a standard as I have tried to indicate workable, it is essential that children should be taught self-control. We all know the Home Education children—how they are taught self-control, and I have often and often proved the truth and the wisdom of Tommie's Aunt. My little ones can "pull themselves together" when birthdays and visitors



have decidedly upset the even tenour of the schoolroom. It is a harder matter to arrive at the practise of self-control by school girls, but without it how paltry their lives are!

We wish them to have self-control in little things as well as in big. I suppose self-forgetfulness, as shown in good manners, is the result very largely of self-control. Manners are the attitude the child presents to the world; the expression of his sense of his own importance in comparison with those he lives with; and exactly in proportion to what we loosely term his egoism, we shall find that his manners are bombastic, dictatorial, servile, modest, or aggressive. These three things, Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control, work so together that it is difficult to differentiate, and say this or that is the result of this or that. Each is so much a part of each, but I have tried to keep as far as possible under the three heads of "God, Self, and the World," and work out these three as the expression of a child's relations to the principal factors of life.

This is the egotistic side of the child's character. I said we would take first the aims we had before us, which I divided as egotistic and altruistic.

#### ALTRUISTIC.

So this brings us now to the consideration of the altruistic side, which may almost be summed up in the familiar phrase "Their rights, my duties." I think we shall all agree that one of the most important of our objects in character training is to help the children to a strong sense of duty. In the lives of the children of wealthy parents this is very difficult. Fictitious duties are so boring to intelligent children, and a luxurious life, with little or nothing left to the children's own responsibility, makes the finding of real duty outside school work very difficult.

School work is duty to children. Under House of Education teachers it is also such joy that its value is lessened as a spur to pleasure-loving natures. And here I think I am wrong, and am rather thinking duty must of necessity be something that is unpleasant, and is done unwillingly.

Further than this, "their rights" means to children the right that others have to expect from them—gentleness, courtesy, personal cleanliness, good temper, and cheerful

obedience. The rendering of these is a duty which everyone owes to his surroundings, and we set ourselves to help our children to the gradual recognition of this as part of their equipment for life.

#### II.—MEANS TO THE END.

And what are our tools with which to attain our ends? Each of our children is entirely individual—what reaches one passes by another. Here is a difficulty, here none at all. We have an excellent curriculum, and a thorough understanding of how to administer it to the best advantage. Five years of P.R.S. work will give any child excellent mental training and an amount of culture that should lay a good foundation for the future of very interesting and intelligent man and woman. But what further? Much, I am sure. We teach the Old Testament splendidly, giving the children a careful, reverent understanding of that most marvellous of all histories, and a thorough explanation of all its difficulties. The children enjoy it; they enter into the spirit of the story, and appreciate the moral significance of each lesson in turn. In fact, they are most glib. The same with the New Testament, which is more difficult, the fear of preaching being always before the teacher. But personal application is the last thing that ever occurs to the children. Perhaps one does not entirely want them to *be* personal, fearing priggishness and morbidity. Still, it is grieving to find that the child who has given you such glib answers on the story of Achan deliberately deceives you an hour later.

Then we have arithmetic. And this is, I think, from our present point of view, the most valuable lesson of all. The children are obliged to be self-reliant, accurate, logical, persevering; truth and common sense are essential. My experience is that this is often the most hopeful lesson of all. It is easier to see real progress in character here than anywhere else. Real difficulties overcome, and power gained. History and geography are lessons that tend to culture of the mind more than the character, except with boys, where the heroic idea becomes a very real thing to them. The school morning goes on. You bring energy and cheerfulness and vitality to each new lesson, and the children do the same. There is a break for drill, and play, and lunch, and they do all three heartily. You do not think so and so takes all her



chances quite fairly, and you think so and so pushes, and is greedy, and someone else is slack, and you brighten up all three. And then the morning is over. You go out. Here is ample opportunity.

But what of the time that has gone? Perhaps I look for trees from mustard seed. Yet, after five years, could we say the children have taken very rapid strides up the path we should like them to tread? We must, of course, expect them to run in accordance with their own natures, not with ours. Yet, when that is considered, what has been done?

We have gone through the morning with vigour and alertness, correcting, inspiring, encouraging, making, I am sure, great steps towards culture, and leaving behind a pleasant memory of an intellectual atmosphere and valuable amount of knowledge. Have we done more than that? Of course we *can*, but how? Are we perhaps too diffident in using what personal influence we possess? Or perhaps too prone to take second best work, or not insistent enough on the children being self-respecting and respondent? Perhaps some of you will be able to say where and why failure is? I am sure none of us who were Miss Mason's friends will say it is because the standard is too high.

During the discussion which followed Miss Lawrence suggested that the great cause of failure in character training was due to the fact that children were too much waited on when young, and so miss the pleasure of being useful to other people.

Miss Wilkinson remarked that we must make opportunities for the children to wait on us and themselves as an exercise in unselfishness.

Miss Drury closed the discussion by thanking Miss Allen for her paper, saying that she had raised questions on matters difficult to us all, and that we should probably find her clear statement of them would be a great help to us in our future work.

## READING ALOUD.

L. LEES.

ON MAKING CHILDREN ANXIOUS TO READ ALOUD  
REALLY WELL.

When we were students at Scale How, we were always haunted, especially during criticism lessons, by a phantom called "The Living Idea." It was bad enough when we were giving the lesson ourselves, but we did not escape when it was someone else's turn; for even then, we were always liable to be suddenly attacked with the question, "What Living Ideas could have been put into that lesson?"

This phantom has pursued us even to our teaching days, when we realize in all its fulness the paramount importance of the "Living Idea."

Especially does it apply to reading aloud. One of the fruits which this Living Idea bears is *Co-operation*. If the children are working with you, eagerly, hand and glove, much may be accomplished; and if the parents are working with you as well, why, then it is better still.

May I tell you one or two of the plans which we have adopted?

It is the custom in this house for mother and grannie (if she be there), to come into the schoolroom every Saturday morning at 11-30. The programme never varies; it is the same as that in the P.R. School at Scale How, only at the end, each child in turn solemnly mounts an improvised platform, and reads aloud either their own composition or their nature notes (which have been rehearsed beforehand, one child criticising the other). One term we did the story of Beowulf in this way; and Saturday by Saturday a new part came out, and was eagerly looked forward to by the audience.

At the end of each term the children know that they will